

LOOKING AHEAD

(This article consists of excerpts from Adam DeBaugh's responses to a questionnaire for the 1993 revision of the Polity course, edited by Rev. Dr. Mona West.)

"In your opinion, where are we as a denomination in the present? What are our greatest challenges for the future?"

The UFMCC is at a crossroads. MCC is the largest organization serving the Gay and Lesbian community in the world. We can wallow in that reality, complacent in it, and refuse to face the challenges that threaten our ascendancy. But that route would end in stagnation, irrelevance and demise. Or we can remain dynamic, fluid, flexible, and responsive.

In fact, we face a number of pivotal choices that will impact directly on our future. These choices are also the greatest challenges for our future. First, are we to continue the process of becoming a highly centralized authoritarian episcopal structure? Or are we to emphasize the life of the local church, and ministries, programs, resources, and services to and from the local churches? The trend toward centralization and consolidation of control in the resident Elders and staff is an important one and one which is being challenged throughout the Fellowship.

Second, are we to remain what we are internationally or develop into national churches? The mythology of MCC is that we are an international church. The reality is that we are an American church with colonial churches in a number of other countries. I don't think this is intentional or deliberate, but rather a function of the fact that MCC was started and has grown significantly in the U.S. so that the vast majority of our churches are American. I believe that national churches in a loose confederation of MCC's worldwide is inevitable. I believe we must choose to enable national churches to come into being in a supportive, open-handed, and collegial way.

Third, how are we going to respond to the pressures of diversity? We could become so diverse that there is no center, few guiding principles and theology, and every belief system and theological fad is accepted. Or we could resist diversity so much that we become rigid, right-wing and intolerant of other points of view. Both tendencies exist in MCC today.

Fourth, what will be our role in the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual movement in the 1990's and 21st century? Will the UFMCC lead, follow, or be forced out of the way? Will MCC remain a relevant, driving force in the struggle for liberation, or will it be a mildly interesting footnote?

Fifth, what will be the UFMCC's role in the developing theology of the church universal? Will we begin to produce scholarship that is not only widely read, but respected, not only disseminated, but seminal in the life of the Church?

Sixth, what will be the UFMCC's role in the ecumenical movement? How will we affect the thinking of the other churches with whom we are in dialogue? What will we do that will affect the lives of our sisters and brothers who are Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual who remain in other churches?



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Seventh, how will the UFMCC play out its commitment to Christian salvation, Christian community, and Christian social action in the world?

Eighth, what will the UFMCC do to heal the major ills of the Lesbian and Gay community? What will we do to address issues of dysfunction, dependence/co-dependence, abuse, abandonment, and self-esteem? How will we "heal our land" (cf. II Chronicles 7:14)?

Ninth, what will we do to further develop our theology of ordination? How will we define and clarify the roles of the laity and the clergy in MCC? How will we further define and clarify the roles of Elders and District Coordinators?

Tenth, will MCC truly work to empower those who have historically been disempowered and disenfranchised in Western culture? Will MCC really work to provide leadership opportunities to people of colors, the handicapped, the poor, women?

Eleventh, how will MCC work to build local churches? Everything done on the upper and middle level judicatories of the UFMCC should be done in order to support, enable, and empower the local church. Some of our policies actually serve to hinder the growth of local churches.

Twelfth, how will the UFMCC address economic inequities in our society?

And thirteenth, will the UFMCC continue to age, or will it begin to attract large numbers of young people as we did in the first decade of our existence? The age demographics of MCC are shifting upward. Are we becoming irrelevant to the Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual movement of the 1990's? Have we nothing to offer young people?

As an editorial footnote to Adam's remarks I would add the following trends which pose particular challenges to UFMCC in the 1990's and 21st century. These trends lead us to ask ourselves, "What is UFMCC's unique contribution to religion and society and how do we as a denomination speak proactively to these concerns?"

1. The resurgence of conservative religion and politics. The late 1980's and early 90's have seen such phenomena as the Regan/Bush administration, Jerry Falwell's "Gay Agenda," Neo-Nazism, Rush Limbaugh, the fundamentalist takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention, increased rigidity of Roman Catholicism, repealing of civil rights laws for gay/lesbian people such as the ones in Oregon and Colorado.
2. The openness of more seminaries/universities and the theological guild to gay/lesbian studies. This includes their increasing interest and energy toward developing "gay/queer" theologies and theory as well as theologies of sexuality.
3. Continued conservative (inerrant/fundamentalist) interpretation of scripture and its use in condemning anyone who does not fit the status quo. Related to this is the need for our clergy to be aware of post-modern approaches to reading texts and the social construction of knowledge. This includes the power of interpretive communities (the traditional church) and understanding reading and writing as a political act (including the reading and writing of the Bible).
4. The need for new paradigms (not the adaptation of traditional heterosexual patriarchal models) that embody responsible, mutually empowering relationships which will provide the basis from which sexual ethics can be done in a meaningful way. This need is evidenced in our struggle as a denomination to develop some type of "policy" around the issue of sexual harassment.

